

**What is RSV?**

RSV is a virus that causes respiratory illness in people of all ages. It is most common in winter and early spring, but it can occur year-round.

Who is at risk for RSV?

Almost all children are infected at least once by age 2. Certain infants and young children are at high risk if they were extremely premature or if they have heart or lung problems. These children may benefit from a monthly injection of an antibody to RSV at the beginning of and continuing throughout the RSV season. In addition, they should avoid tobacco smoke.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

For most children, the symptoms are like cold symptoms. Very young infants are irritable, have poor appetites, are sleepy and may turn blue with cough or brief periods of no breathing. Respiratory problems may include pneumonia or wheezing due to narrowed airways in the lungs.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear from two to eight days after a person is exposed to the virus.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread by direct or close contact with mouth or nose secretions. The virus can live on surfaces for many hours and for 30 minutes or more on hands. Before symptoms appear, the infected person can spread the virus and infect others.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

People can spread the virus for three to eight days; however, young infants may spread the virus for three to four weeks. This usually begins a day or so before signs or symptoms appear.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health-care provider may use laboratory tests to confirm the diagnosis.

What is the treatment?

Treatment is primarily supportive care (taking care of symptoms) and should include prevention of dehydration. All treatment possibilities should be discussed with a health-care provider.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have RSV?

Exclude children who exhibit rapid or labored breathing or episodes when they turn blue.

Infants, toddlers and school-age children should not be excluded unless the staff determines the child is unwilling or unable to participate in activities.

They also should be excluded if the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

What can be done to prevent the spread of RSV disease?

Hand washing is very important. Prevent contact with respiratory secretions. Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing with a disposable facial tissue. To further prevent the spread of disease, wash dirt and soil from contaminated hands, change or cover contaminated clothing, wash hands after using facial tissues and wash hands after having contact with mucus. Dispose of used facial tissues that contain nasal secretions after each use. Sanitize commonly touched surfaces more frequently during the winter and early spring when outbreaks can be expected.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. *Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:523-528.

